

# Japanese Occupation of Malaya, the Pictorial Issues

There is plenty of interest in this apparently straightforward set of stamps, as Susan McEwen demonstrates

The Japanese occupied Malaya from February 1942 to September 1945. To begin with the Japanese occupiers overprinted stamps and postal stationery which had been left in Malayan post offices, and restarting the postal service was given quite a high priority. Singapore's post restarted one month after the surrender. The other states followed over the next couple of months. Initially each State had a postal service within the State, gradually this was expanded to provide a service across Malaya and other occupied territories.

By 1943 a combination of running out of supplies and a desire to impose their own ideas on Malaya caused the occupiers to issue new stamps and these are the subject of this article.

This is an easily accessible subject to collect as there was a limited number of stamps, which are still available at reasonable prices (SG J297/310). Often under-rated or ignored, these issues have interest in their own right.

## Printers

When the Netherlands fell to German occupation in May 1940 the many services which the country had supplied to its colonies stopped. One of the consequences was that Dutch East Indies stamps could no longer be printed in the Netherlands. Kolff & Co in Batavia, DEI, had been quality printers for a long time, and were commissioned to print stamps for the Dutch East Indies. They showed that they could produce stamps of an adequate quality, despite not having been specialist stamp printers. So, in 1943, with the Japanese occupying the Dutch East Indies as well as Malaya, Kolff & Co were a logical choice to print the Japanese Malayan

issues. They might even have been the only practical option.

All the stamps are printed by lithography, on unwatermarked paper of a poorer quality than pre-war stamp printings. All are single-colour printings, perforated 12½, so they would have been quick and simple to print.

## Pictorial definitives

Collectors tend to think of these as a set but they were issued on three different dates, April, June and October 1943 and have two different design styles. The April and June issues, 2c., 4c. and 8c., have solid colour. The other values look more like line drawings.

Most of the subjects feature aspects of Malaya's industry and agriculture and a few show Malayan scenes.

- 1c. grey-green and 3c. in a colour which is true to its name, 'drab', show rubber tapping, one of Malaya's main industries and a major attraction to the occupiers.
- 2c. pale emerald, shows fruit, from the tropical fruit farms of Malaya.
- 4c. carmine-rose, tin dredging, another important Malayan industry.
- 8c. dull blue, the Japanese war memorial at Bukit Batok.

- 10c. brown-purple, a fishing village.
- 15c. violet, Japanese shrine at Singapore.
- 30c. olive-green, sago palms, an important food source.
- 50c. blue, the Straits of Johore.
- 70c. blue, Malay Mosque, Kuala Lumpur.

The 4c. postcard rate and the 8c. letter rate were issued on 29 April 1943. This was Emperor Hirohito's birthday and many first day covers have special birthday cancels (Fig 1). Japanese-occupied North Borneo had a 4c. and 8c. stamp issued the same day, also printed by Kolff of Batavia and in the same style as Malaya's 4c. and 8c.

The 2c. pale emerald, printed paper rate was issued on 1 June 1943 (Fig 2).

The other values were issued on 1 October 1943 (Fig 3).

15c. was the registration fee, 30c. paid for parcels up to 3lb., 50c. for parcels up to 7lb. and 70c. paid the highest parcel rate up to 11lb. Parcel labels with these values are not common, but may be unrecognised as such and are worth looking for.

**Fig 2 (inset)** The 2c. pale emerald was issued on 1 June 1943

**Fig 3** First day cover used at Queen Street Singapore. The Japanese renamed Singapore as Syonan, which means 'Light of the South' or 'Shining Light' depending on the translation. The name is spelt Syonan but pronounced 'sho-nan'

**Fig 1** The 4c. and 8c. with a special commemorative first day cancel. The date is in the Japanese format '2603' 4 29 which is 29 April 1943



Mr. Robert M. Cheong,

158 Waterloo Street,

Syonan.





**Fig 4** Essay for the 3c. value



**Fig 5** Rouletted block of the 4c. 'Singapore printing'



**Fig 6** The two Savings Campaign stamps with a colour trial of the 8c. in red



The 1c., 3c. and 10c. were make-up values, they did not serve particular rates. Advice of Receipt (AR) was 12c., so a range of values could be used depending on the postal service.

These stamps were printed in panes of 100, 10×10, with four panes to a sheet. It is believed that the sheets were generally separated into panes before distribution, but not always, as joined panes exist to confirm the print layout. Kolff & Co were in the habit of putting numbers '1–10' down the left and right-hand side of each pane of stamps, in the margin, presumably to help post office clerks when selling multiples or counting stock. These numbers should not be confused with plate numbers, which Kolff did not use.

### Essays

Essays were made for all values in the pictorial definitive set. They are stamp size, mostly in the issued colours, and are like the stamps except they have a single larger value number. The issued stamps have the value at both the left and right lower corners (*Fig 4* shows the 3c. essay).

### Postal stationery

A 4c. postcard was issued on 29 April 1943. In the same stamp design as the 4c. stamp, the wording is also in red. Most of the cards are on quite flimsy light-weight card, which is watermarked: 'Government Printing Works Singapore'. The watermark extends across several cards, so a card may have part of it or a straight line or no visible watermark. The watermark tells us where the card came from, and probably where the postcards were printed. A vast number of these cards were printed and used postally. They were cheap, available and as postal censorship by the Japanese was tough and continued throughout the occupation, many people must have thought that if they didn't want to send a message publicly—as on a postcard—then they didn't want to put it in writing at all. These postcards provide a source of postmarks for collectors to this day.

### Singapore printings

The 2c. pale emerald and 4c. carmine-rose are known with poor quality impressions, as if the plate was worn and the ink was thin. These are known imperforate or with rouletting instead of perforations, and are called the 'Singapore printings'. Little is known about them for certain, except they were listed in the first stamp catalogues in 1946—so they were printed during the occupation. Very few of them are known used, and those few have dates in late August 1945 during that strange time between the surrender of Japan in August 1945 and the return of British forces to Malaya on 5 September 1945. None have been found on cover (yet!). It is possible that towards the end of the war, with transport between the East Indies and Malaya getting difficult, that the printing plates for the 2c. and 4c. were moved from Batavia to Singapore. A single transfer of plates, thereby avoiding the need to send bales of printed stamps. In this scenario, only the 2c. and 4c. were printed, as in multiples they would cover most postal requirements. Perhaps they were printed at the Singapore printing works, but as no perforating machines were available there, they were rouletted or left imperforate. If this scenario is true, it must have taken place about July or August 1945. We will probably never know for sure what happened and the name 'Singapore printings' will suffice until someone can prove the full story of these stamps. *Fig 5* shows the 4c. red in a rouletted block.

### Savings campaign issue

8c. violet letter rate and 15c. scarlet registration rate stamps were issued on 1 September 1943. This issue has a simple bold design which was used for both values and was printed economically in only one colour for each value. The result is a simple but effective design. *Fig 6* shows the two issued stamps and a colour trial of the 8c. value in red.

### Rebirth of Malaya

Issued on 15 February 1944, the second anniversary of the fall of Singapore, this issue is meant to commemorate the rebirth of

Malaya as part of Greater Japan. The design shows rice being planted, with a map of South East Asia in the background. The picture is not clear, the design being a little complicated for the size of a stamp, perhaps? Like the Savings Campaign stamps, only two values were issued. The 8c. is in rose-red and the 15c. in magenta.

*Fig 7* shows the 8c. of this issue on a re-used envelope from the Military Officer at Jasin to the Officer in charge of Land Revenue at Malacca, 24 March 1944. The red and purple square marks at the left are the Censorship marks from the envelope's previous use.

### Postal service

During the occupation the postal service covered the areas occupied by the Japanese: Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Hong Kong and parts of China, in addition to Japan. Most of the mail was local,

**Fig 7** The 8c. Rebirth of Malaya stamp on a re-used envelope from the Military Officer at Jasin



**Fig 8 (left)** 4c. postal stationery card sent from Singapore to Medan  
**Fig 9 (below left)** Japanese stamps authorised for use in Malaya on a first day cover to Kota Bharu  
**Fig 10 (below)** Japanese stamps with a Malayan postmark of Bentong



to State. Under those conditions the post was the best way of keeping in touch with family in other parts of the occupied territories.

### Japanese stamps authorised for use in Malaya

If you are collecting these Japanese printed Malayan stamps, you will probably come across some Japanese stamps used in Malaya during the occupation. On 8 December 1942, on the first anniversary of the start of the Pacific war, and five months before the pictorial definitives started being issued, the Japanese authorities issued four Japanese stamps in Malaya, for use there. Fig 9 shows the original four Japanese values, on a first day cover used at Kota Bharu, Kelantan, dated 8 December 1942 (12.8.2602).

Further Japanese stamps were authorised in February 1943. These were mainly used in Japan and can only be recognised as 'Malayan' by their postmarks. Fig 10 shows two Japanese stamps used at Bentong on 5 March 1943 (3.5.2603). Diligent searchers, who know their postmarks, may still find unrecognised examples of Japanese stamps used in Malaya.

### The end

In September 1945, after the Japanese had surrendered, and the British returned to Malaya, all Japanese issued stamps were invalidated. The free post period of one month enabled the British Military Administration to restart the postal service before the arrival of the BMA stamps, but that is another aspect of the fascination which Malaya has for stamp and postal history collectors.

within Malaya, a very small percentage was to other places. There was no civilian postal service from the occupied territories to anywhere not under Japanese control. Prisoner of war mail via the Red Cross is of course the exception, which explains the qualification 'civilian'. Fig 8 shows a 4c. postal stationery card from Singapore (Syonan) to Medan in the Japanese-occupied Dutch East Indies sent on 9 December 1943 (2603.12.9). This is totally commercial, the message is in Malay and appears to be an invoice. There was no airmail service in or from Malaya during the occupation. There was a fee, 30c., for an Express service, and a pink 'Express' label, but no proof that any form of Express service actually existed. Registration, Advice of Receipt and parcel services were available.

### Postal rates

The rates outlined above remained in use throughout the occupation and were not increased. Inflation was rampant and everything was in short supply, from food to cooking oil to clothing and petrol; medicines

ran out, even paper was short. By 1944 paper shortages meant that it was common practice to turn envelopes inside out to reuse them. Inflation during the occupation averaged 100 times, that is a factor of 100 not 100 per cent. Some items increased by more than that, some a little less. Postage at the 8c. basic letter rate would have been \$8 if it had been increased at the inflation rate. Many families had been dispersed in the early part of the Occupation. Chinese in Singapore with home addresses in the Malay states were forcibly returned by the Japanese. Others had moved to try to avoid the fighting and the bombing. Travel around Malaya was restricted, an internal passport and official authorisation was needed to travel from State

• •

**Diligent searchers may still find unrecognised examples of Japanese stamps used in Malaya**